

UNCLAS MANAMA 000703

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/FO; P; PA; NEA/PPD; SA/PPD; NEA/ARPI

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL KISL OIIP KPAO BA

SUBJECT: OUTREACH FOLLOWING NEWSWEEK'S RETRACTION OF ITS STORY ALLEGING KORAN DESECRATION - BAHRAIN SUBMISSION

¶1. PAS Manama has widely distributed to all Bahraini media outlets all official texts and statements on this issue. On May 17, Bahrain's media provided full coverage of Newsweek's retraction of its story alleging Koran desecration at Guantanamo. Daily newspapers carried wire stories with the Newsweek retraction and Bahrain radio included updates on its hourly news broadcasts. We expect Bahrain Satellite Television to carry the Newsweek retraction during its widely watched 15:00 afternoon newscast today, May 17.

¶2. On Friday, May 13, Bahrain Tribune carried Secretary Rice's statement on the front page. On May 14, Al Wasat newspaper reported that Shaikh Salah Al Jowder had commented on the story during his Friday sermon, and had called for "a peaceful condemnation to the American administration about this violation." Press coverage of Friday sermons indicate that the issue was not raised in other sermons in Bahrain.

¶3. This issue has not had much traction in Bahrain. There have been no protests or demonstrations to date and press coverage has focused almost entirely on official texts distributed by the Embassy and wire stories. Two editorials have been written about the issue to date, one critical of the U.S. and one stating that these actions, if they did take place, were isolated incidents and did not reflect the will of the American people. Today's papers included statements by two political societies "denouncing the unethical act of defaming the Koran" and demanding that "the U.S. Administration punish the perpetrators." One of the societies asked for an apology from the U.S.; neither statement called for demonstrations.

¶4. Akhbar Al Khaleej reported on May 17 that a Sunni Islamist bloc in Parliament is discussing the possibility of issuing a statement calling for respecting and defending the Koran and asking the U.S. Administration to speed up its investigations and issue an apology to all Muslims. It is unclear if the statement by the parliamentary bloc will now be issued given the Newsweek retraction.

¶5. Our interlocutors, including several ministers, have not raised the issue in meetings with the Ambassador or other members of the country team thus far. The PAO and APAO spent half the day at the University of Bahrain on May 15 in meetings with faculty and students and the issue was not raised. Barring the issuance of a statement by a bloc in the Parliament, it is post's view that this story will not gain further momentum in Bahrain.

Monroe